DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 063 598 CS 000 029

AUTHOR Taschow, H. G.
TITLE Pathway to Critical Reading.
PUB DATE May 72
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at Annual Convention of International Reading Assn. (17th, Detroit, May 10-13, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Continuous Learning; *Critical Reading; *Questioning Techniques; Reading Comprehension; Reading Improvement; *Reading Skills; Teacher Role; *Thought Processes

ABSTRACT

Critical reading is a continuous process, only beginning in the first grade, which necessitates carefully planned training by qualified teachers. By building upon the student's competence in literal reading, interpretation, evaluation, integration of facts, accurate recall, and reorganization of materials, the teacher can develop the student's questioning attitudes to a point where the student will be able to evaluate his ideas against those presented, bringing forth a different and/or new understanding of the subject matter. Two samples for grade one and grade eleven are given which illustrate the workability of this approach. However, to foster the student's ability to read critically, to improve and refine this ability, and to encourage the student to exercise this ability, the teacher must be well versed in the art of critical reading himself. (A reference list is included.) (HS)

ED 063598

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Dr. H. G. Taschow
Chairman, Reading Education
Faculty of Education
University of Saskatchewan
Regina Campus
Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0A2
Canada

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
H. G. Taschow
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

CS 000 029

PATHWAY TO CRITICAL READING

I.R.A. Convention, Detroit,

Session: Critical Reading

Friday, May 12, 1:30 - 2:30

Cobo Hall, Room 3040

What Does the Literature Say?

In many college and university textbooks on Reading it is said that the ability to read critically or to react critically to what has been read is of great importance in a democratic society. This slogan appears to be overplayed to the extent that critical reading is now a blanket term sharing a similar fate with reading comprehension which is used with little or no distinction of the

mental processes involved.

Comparing sixty-three studies during the last thirty years one finds ready-made lists citing special skills for reading critically in schools, in designated grades, and subject matter areas. They beg to accept the idea that, when the skills listed are followed, critical reading will result. Looking further, little or no agreement is evidenced in the literature concerning a definition on this type of reading. The scope of what critical reading supposedly is stretches from literal reading skills to creative and interpretive reading, and from good oral reading with sensible expression to effective silent reading with recall and reorganization skills. Directly or indirectly, the notion that the teaching of critical reading is reserved for high school students dominates thus relegating critical reading to a time when students are older, have accumulated more knowledge and, perhaps, are more intelligent. However, to what degree, if any, is critical reading dependent upon these variables? Spache and Spache (13) after some contemplation on this matter concluded that "all these ideas about critical reading are misconceptions."

What is Critical Reading?

If so, then what is critical reading? As already mentioned the term is confused with vague descriptions and literature disagrees concerning the attributes of critical reading (9).

While there is uncertainty and lack of agreement among reading authorities, it can be gleaned from the differing viewpoints that critical reading is learned and requires an author and a reader. Both

are persons and both enter into mutual interactions. For further discussions, the writer offers the following definition: critical reading is a learned, purposeful, planned, thinking process over a sustained period of time in which the reader supported by his reading experiences, background and training enters actively, intelligently and emotionally with the author in such a way that the outcome of their shared interactions result in a different or new understanding.

As professed there is neither limitation on age, knowledge, or intelligence, on elementary schooling or special subject matter area teaching, nor is there preference on general or special textbook selections. It is the writer's opinion that critical reading can be done by elementary and secondary students as well as by college and university undergraduate and graduate students. The only question imperative to the aforementioned is do teachers offer comprehensive training in critical reading?

How Shall We Proceed?

According to the definition, critical reading is a learned, planned, purposeful, thinking process over a prolonged period of time. Research by Osborn (12), Nardelli (11), and Brownell (2) indicated that training in critical reading over a longer period of time shows greater significant gains. Results of these studies suggest for school application that training must be systematic and continuous and not be left to incidental learning. This suggests a meticulous planned approach by both teachers and students as to physical settings of time and place, what is to happen when and where and who is involved

and what materials to be used. Then a more painful task unfolds, that of setting clear-cut purposes with ensuing an ever present questioning attitude. This attitude is directed towards the mutual interactions between the author and the reader challenging each other's purposes, attitudes and emotions in the light of the presented content.

One must pause here to call to attention two essential ingredients most often overlooked in the basic abilities fundamental to a critical reading program. Just as without yeast the dough does not rise, so without setting clear-cut purposes and a habit of progressive questioning the skill to read critically does not develop. Literally, hundreds of students in colleges and universities who have been taught by the writer or have come to him for reading help, professed dear lack of these two basic components. As the writer has explained elsewhere (14), setting of purposes and progressive questioning must be taught systematically in order that students apply these skills.

In the opinion of the writer and supported by numerous try-outs, it is probably correct to say that the vehicle towards achievement of critical reading is to adopt a questioning attitude (6). This type of attitude is first steeped in the reader's proficiency to handle literal reading skills where factual understanding prepares for interpretation, evaluation and integration within his background experiences. It is the part in reading which is commonly designated as 'bringing meaning to the printed page in order to take meaning from it.' While the foregoing is necessary to critical reading, it is not yet critical reading itself. Questions have to surge farther to confront the reader with the author in order to seek out the real

possible among the variants of the hypothetical possible. At this point, students are induced to leave the passivity of the learning process called education to cross the barrier from learning to thinking (3). It is at this stage that the mass-feeding process of disseminating informations in a knowledge-getting procedure to passive registering students ends. Where 'Reading Beyond the Lines' (1 and 5) ends, critical reading begins.

The reader is now the individual who is actively engaged with the author, questioning, probing, comparing, testing, and evaluating his ideas against those presented. What was uncertain will become certain, what was obscure will become clear, and what was unreal will become real. Thus training in critical reading is also indicating the improvement of an individual's thinking processes.

Where and When Should Critical Reading Begin?

It must be stated so that no doubt arises, that the teaching of critical reading begins in grade one. For this purpose a two-sentence sample from the story "THE MOON BOY" (10) as it appears in the grade-one book of the READ series is presented: "When they got to the store, Mrs. Lee and Peg went to the third floor, where hats were sold. Bob stayed on the first floor, where toys were sold."

For the first-grade pupil to understand this cited passage, the child must be able to assimilate-accommodate-in-equilibrium concepts of space, time, classification, seriation, and number, supported by social knowledge pertaining to this event and through symbolic function imagine the entire situation depicted in this two sentence paragraph.

'Store, first and third floor' require concepts of space because the three people were in the same store but on different floors. Being in the store indicates that the three people spent a certain amount of time - concept of time - together in the store, then separated to go to two different floors to look at different things. It also denotes that during this interval of time they were in the store, they were absent from home. Classification involves the concept that Mrs. Lee, Peg and Bob are all members of the same family. Seriation includes the concept that Mrs. Lee is the mother of Peg and Bob, Peg a child and daughter of Mrs. Lee and also the sister of Bob, and Bob a child and son of Mrs. Lee and the brother of Peg. The concept of numerical quantification is evidenced in the recognition that there were three people in the store who separated into two and one. To understand the content of the phrases 'where hats were sold' ..... 'where toys were sold', the child needs to grasp concepts of intensive or logical quantification. At last, social knowledge is required to understand that a store of this nature has at least three floors, how to get up and down from one floor to the next, what to find on each floor, and how to look at and to obtain things.

So far literal reading skills, accurate recall and reorganization of facts, their interpretations as well as relevancy of content materials and the accurate judging of what has happened have been thoroughly undertaken. Based on this understanding, the first-grade child is ready for further planned guidance in critical reading consistent with his own performance level. The following questions may be considered

for application: What do you think mother may have thought when Bob stayed on the first floor? What kinds of feelings may she have at this moment? Supposing you are Bob, how would you feel being alone on the first floor in a big store? How do you think mother, Peg and Bob found each other again in this store? What do you think mother may have said to Bob before going up to the third floor? What may happen to Bob if he forgets the place where to meet with his mother and sister? What can he do then? What can his mother and sister do? If you are Bob, how can you make sure that you will meet mother and sister?

While these are some possible questions to be asked, they all require the first-grade children to sort out the hypothetical from the real and arrive at a different or new understanding of how to take care of themselves when placed in a situation similar to Bob.

Critical reading on higher levels, as, for instance, on a grade eleven level, must be in keeping with the students learning activities, background experiences, and their general and specific language development. From HISTORY USA, page 241, the following sample is presented: "In what way was the work of the missionaries more important than that of the mountain men in the eventual settlement of Oregon by Americans?" After the groundwork has been laid in terms of understanding facts, interpretations, relationships and so on, the following instructions may be given:

If A, the missionaries, and B, the mountain men, are two variables of which the outcome X, the settlement, might be some kind of function,

discuss -in writing or orally- all the contingencies that are possible. To accomplish the task, students need to activate hypothetico-deductive thinking which they can do in two ways, either logico-mathematical or logico-descriptive. Through critical reactions to what they have read, students have to discover the "is" portion of the "might be" totality by imagining all that might be there and "thereby of much better insuring the finding of all that is there."(7).

Critical reactions expressed in logico-mathematical terms are:

1. neither A nor B produces X, alone or in combination;
2. A elicits X, but B does not;
3. B elicits X, but A does not;
4. A and B elicit X, separately or jointly;
5. A and B together produce X, but neither alone does;
6. A produces X if B is absent, but not if B is present;
7. B produces X if A is absent, but not if A is present;

etc.

Critical reactions expressed in logico-descriptive terms are:

1. Neither was the work of the missionaries nor that of the mountain men, alone or in combination, more important in the eventual settlement of Oregon by Americans.
2. The work of the missionaries alone was important but not that of the mountain men in the eventual settlement of Oregon by Americans.

etc.

In similar fashion, but always based on the thorough understanding of the presented content, students learn to critically evaluate human resources, human relations, and possible biases of the author as well as his emotions. Through this kind of training in critical reading and reacting critically to it, students learn (1) to withold judgment until they are sure that they fully understand the selection read and (2) to formulate for themselves standards on which valid judgment can be based (8). The outcome of the training to read critically and to react to it, represents active involvement in thinking and in talking out conclusions which, in turn, may result in a different or even new understanding of the particular subject under investigation.

To Whom Belongs the Task?

The task as well as the responsibility to train children in reading critically belongs to the teacher. Training to read critically is equal to a developmental process that requires thoughtful and meticulous planning. This process begins with the first formal schooling and is a continuous, guided and systematic undertaking through the grades of elementary and secondary schools and beyond. In the writer's opinion, it is a life-long development that death can only terminate. Teachers should look at this task in a way of cultivating critical reading. To cultivate this type of reading charges the teachers with the everpresent responsibility to foster the growth of the children's ability to read critically, to improve and to refine this ability as the children move from grade to grade, and to encourage them to seek the opportunity to exercise this ability for themselves as well as in a group with others/

Teachers must be warned that this does not come through just having acquired the ability to read as a grade-one student has, nor does it come through prolonged reading of textbooks or mounts of literature as students are required in high school. The notion of 'to read, read, read,' and as a result suddenly one reads critically does not bear out what one has hoped for and is not a realistic one. Instead, teachers must plan carefully for this training to be offered to their students.

For the teachers it means to be trained in the art of critical reading in order to teach their charges and guide them along the pathway. Perhaps, questions need to be asked directed toward teacher training institutions: Is the teaching of critical reading included in the elementary and secondary teacher preparation? Is there, and if not, should there be a course dealing with this type of reading which signifies the culmination of all reading skills put together and beyond. If reading literature is agreed upon as it is and spells out the importance of this ability to the perpetuation of our pattern of life in a democracy, then in the writer's opinion the only place to materialize this claim is in our schools through the media of the teachers.

What Has Been Learned?

The process of becoming proficient in the ability to read critically and to react critically to what had been read

(1) begins in grade one and, from thereon, is a continuous development;

(2) necessitates a carefully planned training by competent

teachers;

(3) builds upon student's competence of literal reading skills, interpretation, evaluation, and integration of facts, accurate recall and reorganization of relevant materials;

(4) requires the meeting of the minds between author and reader to investigate, exchange, and share biases and emotions; and

(5) brings forth a different and/or new understanding not by being coerced into or persuaded to do so, but through constant "critical, reflective search for valid conclusions" (4).

All other things being equal, it can be concluded from pedagogical and psychological viewpoints that the training in the ability to read critically is desirable and essential, but also complex and difficult.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Adler, M. J. How To Read a Book. 16th printing, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1967, p. 14.

2. Brownell, J. A. "The Influence of Training in Reading in the Social Studies on the Ability to Think Critically," in: California Journal of Educational Research, (January, 1953), 28-31.

3. Bruner, J. S. "Learning and Thinking," in: Reading in the Psychology of Cognition, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., New York, 1965, p. 80.

4. Burton, W. H., R. B. Kimball and R. L. Wing. Education for Effective Thinking, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., New York, 1960, p. VI.

5. Cutter, V. "And Beyond The Lines." in: Vistas in Reading, Proceedings 1966, Vol. 11, Part I, I.R.A., Newark, Delaware, 1967, p. 64.

6. DeVere, E. "Developing Ability to React to and Use Ideas Read in Junior and Senior Highschools." in: Basic Instruction in Reading in Elementary and High Schools, Supplementary Educational Monographs No. 65, University press of Chicago, Chicago, 1948, pp. 173-178.

7. Flavell, J. H. The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget. D. Van Norstrand Co., New Jersey, 1963, p. 205.

8. Gray, W. S. "Increasing the Basic Reading Competencies of Students." in: Reading in the High School and College, 47th Yearbook of the NSSE, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1948, p. 107.

9. Huus, H. "Innovations in Reading Instruction: At Later Levels." in: Innovations and Change in Reading Instruction, 67th Yearbook of the NSSE, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1968, pp. 146-147.

10. Johnson, M. S., R. A. Kress, et. al. "Each and All." in: READ Series Teacher Ed., American Book Co., New York, 1968, p. 198.

11. Nardelli, R. R. "A Study of Some Aspects of Creative Reading." in: Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1953.

12. Osborn W. W. "An Experiment in Teaching Resistance to Propaganda." in: Journal of Experimental Education, 8(September, 1939), 1-17.

13. Spache, G. D. and E. B. Spache. Reading in the Elementary School. 2nd edition, Allyn and Bacon, Inc., Boston, 1968, p. 310.

14. Taschow, H. G. "Reading in Subject Matter Areas." in: QUERY Saskatchewan Reading Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1, Winter, 1971, p. 21.